

Aikidosphere

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Memories of the Second Doshu

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Editor's Note: Chiba Sensei's meditation on the passing of the Second Doshu first appeared in the Summer 1999 issue of Sansho. The photographs used with this article depicting the Second Doshu with Chiba Sensei as his uke have been reproduced from Kisshomaru Ueshiba's book Aikido published in 1974.



As I began to write this memorial of the Second Doshu, I realized that there was not a single incident, among the many memories I have of him, that could be called dynamic or dramatic. Incidentally, this made me not only see his personality in a new light but also helped me realize the significant differences in the relationship I had with him compared to his father, the Founder. To briefly describe these differences: the Second Doshu represents the power of the moon while the Founder represents the sun.

The Second Doshu's calm temperament, together with the presence of strong self-control and abundant intelligence, made him a man who was a master of modesty, a gentleman. Although he was a man of profound self-pride, he always was modest and chose his words carefully when he spoke. I never saw him offend anyone. He was highly disciplined in his physical performance of even commonplace activities such as sitting, walking, talking, drinking tea and so forth. In these daily activities, as well as in his Aikido, he created the ambiance of highly cultivated nobility which often reminded me of the refined Court culture.

Needless to say, his performance of Aikido was beyond comparison to anyone I have ever known. It was a complete physical expression of his philosophy of Aikido; there was not the slightest gap between what he believed Aikido to be and the way he practiced it.

To compare the performance of Aikido in the Second Doshu and the Founder, I would say that the Founder's Aikido was thoroughly martial in the highest dimension. The Founder's Aikido expressed the origin of martial power as a part of a living force that is associated with the evolution of the universe. In this regard, the Founder tried to convey a message stemming from the dialogue he had with the gods in his daily religious practice. In contrast, the Second Doshu expressed his philosophical belief in the harmony of nature, and therefore "go with the flow" was a dominant part of his Aikido. Perhaps he wasn't as martial as his father, but his entire effort was clearly to emphasize that Aikido goes beyond the martial.

As we all know, the Second Doshu wrote many books about Aikido, and quite a few have been translated into English. I cannot really judge the quality of the English translation, but he wrote well in Japanese and proved that he was a master of style. His writings

demonstrate that he had an extensive knowledge of both Chinese and Japanese classics, blended with a modern education. Such a blend is considered to be what makes a man of culture in Japan.

Among the many books he wrote, his first, published in 1958, is the one which is most appealing to me. It is responsible for my destiny of choosing Aikido as my life path. In addition, the book expresses his passion and immovable faith in the path of Aiki, the sense of responsibility he inherited from his father, and his determination to convey the passage of Aiki to society at a time when the Japanese people had not yet fully recovered from the impact of Japan's defeat in the Second World War, particularly with regard to their national confidence.

The denial of the inherent value of the national culture, history and traditions was a dominant current following Japan's surrender in 1945. This was due not only to Japan's loss of confidence from losing the war, but stemmed as well from policies promoted by the general headquarters of the occupying army. Although materially and economically Japan eventually started to increase its strength -- triggered by an industrial boom stimulated by the Korean War which broke out in 1950 -- Japan was still struggling psychologically to define its own identity.

I believe that through his first book, the Second Doshu reached the hearts of many individuals and gave the Japanese a model for the resurrection of their national pride. The book revealed the profound passage of Aiki, revived from Japan's own traditions into a new life form, and thus provided an example of embracing tradition as a source of evolution toward a modern society.

After the Second Doshu's passing, a senior teacher at Hombu Dojo stated that the Founder had opened the path of non-path, and that the Second Doshu paved the path for everyone's sake. I am not sure I fully agree with this, but, nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Second Doshu devoted his full life to making the path of Aiki available to the common people, rather than limiting access to the elite which was the tradition before the end of the Second World War.

Aikido, as it is given to us today, is the product of the Second Doshu's life work, which he carried out with a profound commitment and sense of responsibility. It has thus become the precious common property of humanity. The more I think about it, the greater I appreciate the work he chose to carry out and his accomplishments.

My first encounter with him in person occurred on February 3, 1958, when I met him inside the entrance hall of his home in Shinjuku, Tokyo. After having read his first book, which I accidentally found at a bookstore in downtown Tokyo, I was determined to become the Founder's uchideshi. I packed my things, including my futon bedding, in a huge package and sent it to his residential address (Hombu Dojo and his residence were in the same building) prior to my arrival for an interview. I did this deliberately to demonstrate my solid determination to achieve my objective to become uchideshi. I didn't write to him because I knew that a letter would be either rejected or disregarded.

The Second Doshu was standing at the center of the upper entrance hall when I called, looking down at me in a lower section of the hall where I saw my package sitting and taking up lots of space. "Is this yours?" he asked me. I acknowledged that it was and stated the reason why I was there with words I had been preparing and practicing repeatedly in the few days before I arrived there. I spoke briefly and clearly and showed an immovable intention. He listened to me calmly and was cold as ice without showing any emotion. "We don't take any uchideshi anymore like we used to, so take your package and leave at once," he said to me.

He was slim, of medium height with thick long black hair, and he wore round eyeglasses. I could not see any expression on his face, except in his eyes which revealed the power of uncompromising determination. Nevertheless, I knew well what to expect so I began to demonstrate the second stage of tactics which I had prepared in order to achieve my objective. I took my package out of the entrance hall and went outside and sat down, determined to sit there without moving until I was accepted.

One may think that, in spite of what I said at the beginning of this article, my first encounter with Second Doshu was dramatic. As far as I am concerned, it was not. Everything went the way I expected, just like a time-honored script for a play that one has practiced over and over again, and the whole encounter did not take more than five minutes.

He must have been thirty-eight years old then. It was not long after he had succeeded in persuading his father to open the door to the public by performing the first public demonstration, in 1956. When I think back now on my seven years of life as an uchideshi before I was sent to Britain in 1965, I recognize that his strategic theme was to convey the message of Aikido as a new martial art for a new age. He set this strategic objective firmly and carried out the tactical work step by step, point by point, with astonishing patience and steadiness until he finally accomplished his goal.

He was a distinctly different individual from his father. Because he differed both physically and mentally, and because the current of the times had changed, he could not pursue the Art the same way his father had. Nevertheless, after all, I consider him as distinguished a martial artist in his own way.

As I mentioned earlier in this memorial, he represents the power of the moon and his father represents the power of the sun. While the sun symbolizes a dominant, uplifting, expansive force like fire, the moon represents the cool intellect, introspection, and synthesis, like the quality of

water. I see the same quality in many resourceful military strategists who have left their imprint on history.

Although my first encounter with Second Doshu was rather cool, I also have a very heart-warming memory of him. In my diary written on May 1, 1958, a few months after I was accepted as an uchideshi, I wrote:

"Waka Sensei [we used to call him this, which means junior Master, as opposed to O-Sensei, which means great or old Master] and Mr. Seko [an old disciple of O-Sensei's who was, at the time, a member of the Board of Directors of Hombu Dojo] returned at 11:30 pm. After closing the front gate, I started to serve sake for them, as they ordered. They looked like they had been drinking already, as they seemed happy and more open. Mr. Seko then grabbed my shoulder and said to me, 'There are not many fine young men like you nowadays. However, you must take much hardship and discipline while you train at this Dojo. Be positive, then everything you go through will become your nutrition to grow until you become a man of substance.'

"I was so embarrassed by this as I only had seen him a couple of times before. Besides, he smelled of alcohol [at that time I could not drink]. Then I was even more surprised to hear what Waka Sensei said to me. He called my name loudly, 'Chiba, listen, don't take Mr. K's ukemi in the forthcoming demonstration in Kawasaki. He is a bit tough and I don't want you to risk yourself.' [I don't know how he found out that I was preparing to take Mr. K's ukemi, at his request, at the third public demonstration which was scheduled in October on the rooftop of a department store.]

"How fortunate I was in being an uchideshi under the wing of such fine gentlemen as they were. I must strive even harder in my training in order to meet their favor."

In many ways, I have been a rebellious disciple in my Aikido all the way through my career, but the Second Doshu was always gentle and kind to me and made me feel that I was trusted somehow.

After my resignation from Hombu Dojo in 1978 over a disagreement about the general policy of the Dojo, including overseas issues, he suddenly made a visit, himself alone, to the village where I was living. I had a wonderful time with him over washing his back in a natural spring bath and at the dinner table of a Japanese inn specializing in spring baths. He left for Tokyo the next morning. I believe he came to see me to make sure that I was doing all right.

Lastly, I have found a beautiful passage to the path of Aiki in the many books he has written. However, although it may be too much to expect, I am still not totally satisfied with the presentation of the historical aspects of the Art. In his position as the Second Doshu, he was responsible for establishing an authentic history. As far as I am concerned, it is still not complete. If it is to be considered an authentic history, it should reveal the objective truth and be able to stand against criticism for many generations to come. I sincerely hope that the Third Doshu is aware of this and accepts as part of his responsibility the need to complete what has been left undone.

The writing of a history of the Art requires a human quality other than being a good writer and/or martial artist, especially when the author himself is in the middle of the historic development of the Art. It requires perspective and an impartial and objective eye, coupled with a profound understanding and keen interest in human nature and its dynamic encounters. This is what I am expecting to see in the new era of Third Doshu, who stands at the center of all as the grand master of the third generation.

Thank you, Second Doshu, for your kindness to me and the work you have accomplished, through which many individuals in the world are given a chance to enrich their lives, a chance which you made available. Please rest well.

Gassho (Palm to Palm) T.K. Chiba April 5, 1999